

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET15 March 2018Report by Deputy Chief ExecutiveSupport for East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To seek the Cabinet's approval to continue additional grant funding in 2018/19 and 2019/20 to support East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in its work towards mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- notes the update in relation to Welfare Reform and the planned roll out of Universal Credit in East Renfrewshire in September 2018.
- notes the continued progress which has been made by East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) supporting Residents through the financial complexities of welfare reform changes.
- considers provision of additional grant funding of £40,000 to support East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in its work towards mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform for a further 2 years in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

**BACKGROUND**

3. In June 2016, the Cabinet reviewed the continued progress that had been made in mitigating and preparing for the impacts of Welfare Reform which included the commencement of Universal Credit in east Renfrewshire in February 2016. Mainstreaming of Welfare Reform contingency provision was approved for key posts within Customer First/Money Advice & Rights Team (MART) which were required to maintain the Scottish Welfare Fund and continue supporting our most vulnerable customers with the challenges of welfare reform

4. It was recognised that alongside MART, the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) is a key partner in the provision of local support to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform, ensuring local residents are accessing their rightful entitlement to benefits and it was agreed to continue the provision of additional grant funding of £40,000 in 2017/18 to support this work.

## REPORT

5. Welfare reform changes continue to impact residents, with Universal Credit full digital service rollout now planned for East Renfrewshire in September 2018. For residents this means that anyone on an existing legacy benefit (e.g. Employability and Support Allowance, Job Seekers Allowance, Housing Benefits, Tax Credits, Income Support) who reports a change of circumstances will then be paid Universal Credit, which in many cases will be at a lower amount than the legacy benefit. There is no transitional protection for this group. Claimants will be expected to maintain their benefit claim online and conform to the strict conditions of their benefit. Residents will need support with ICT access and digital online claims.

6. The demand for assistance in relation to Welfare Benefits continues to rise in East Renfrewshire. Within the Council MART continues to see an increase in service demand with Client Financial gains in Welfare Benefits reaching £4.3 million from 1 April 17 to date, demonstrating a 9% increase for the same period in 2016. Welfare Benefits is the highest demand advice service offered by East Renfrewshire CAB with total financial gains reaching £2.7million from 1/4/17 to date.

7. There is a Service Level Agreement in place between the Council and CAB which outlines the funding streams that are paid to CAB. There are three main funding streams:

- a. £102,500 Grant from the Voluntary and Community Grants fund which relates to general service provision delivered by CAB offering free, independent, confidential and impartial advice which is based on respect for the customer;
- b. £42,000 funded to provide advice in relation to housing related matters; and
- c. £12,500 funded to support provision of money advice services

8. In addition the Council has awarded grant funding of £40,000 to East Renfrewshire CAB annually since 2014 and this funds one full time member of staff who undertakes all aspects of benefit support work.

9. The successful outcomes directly linked to the post in CAB funded by the council. In the current financial year to date is £607.6K which represents 22% of the total Client Financial Gains in Welfare Benefits achieved by CAB during this period.

10. The demand for benefits advice is expected to increase further over the next few years, with the introduction of Universal Credit and CAB will be impacted in similar ways to MART with increasing caseload and demands for services. Cabinet are asked if they choose to approve £40,000 of additional funding to CAB to continue to support this work, from the welfare contingency fund, for a further two years.

## FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

11. The Cabinet approved a contingency sum from 2013/14 to 'top up' government funding for welfare reform and administration of the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Head of Accountancy has confirmed that this grant can be accommodated for 2018/19 and 2019/20 within existing fund levels should the Cabinet agree to continue this funding.

## **CONSULTATION AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

12. Consultation has taken place with appropriate Council services and the Citizens Advice Bureau and DWP continue to be involved in strategic planning for welfare reform.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

13. It is recommended that the Cabinet:

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- considers provision of additional grant funding of £40,000 to support East Renfrewshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) in its work towards mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform for a further 2 years in 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Caroline Innes, Deputy Chief Executive

15 March 2018

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## **KEY WORDS**

Welfare reform, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Benefits, Support, Universal Credit

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